

# Famous Trees of the District and Nearby



*Treaty Oak*

## "Treaty Oak"

(This is the seventh of a series of etchings and drawings of famous old trees in the Washington area by Minnie L. Briggs, with an interesting word sketch by the artist of their historic background.)

ON GROUND rich in romance and tradition of Indian days grows the old "Treaty Oak," one of the largest and most beautifully shaped and proportioned white oaks in the District. Its great branches when in leaf shade perhaps a quarter of an acre of the highest ground of the old Deanwood estate at Connecticut and Florida avenues, which now, as Masonic headquarters, bears the name of Temple Heights.

The peace, beauty and enduring strength felt in contemplation of this old tree are heightened for those who know its story—they are given an almost personal quality. Even before the coming of the white man, tradition has it, the ground under its spreading arms had become a sort of hallowed place to the Indian. It was treaty-making ground to which Indian chieftains repaired for their solemn compacts of peace whenever war-weariness overtook them. And so, too, it continued to be a place for peaceful undertakings between Indians and the pioneer whites.

It was in this pioneer period that Manacasset, chief of the Anacostan Tribe, chose the eminence upon which "Treaty Oak" grows for his tribal ground, and pitched his wigwam beneath the tree. But Manacasset, choosing it probably for strategic reasons, was unworthy of the peaceful traditions of the place. The raids of his tribesmen upon the white settlers made his name a terror to them.

It was in one of these raids that Manacasset took captive Magdalena Noyes and her golden-haired baby daughter. For her refusal to become his squaw, history tells us, Manacasset

sentenced Magdalena never to leave the shade of the great oak tree under pain of death. So with her baby daughter, whom she named Gwawa, meaning "Hope," she lived there through the years a prisoner.

During these years romance blossomed and flourished under the old oak. Most of the Indian children, the story goes, shunned the little "pale face" Gwawa. Only Tschagarag, a little half-breed, condescended to be her early playmate. Through adolescence his condescension became love—and perhaps imagination helps history tell the story of how the half-breed lover led Gwawa through the glories of spring in the wilderness, taught her the language of its wild creatures, wondered at the beauty of flowers, trees, stars with her. And finally took her for his bride.

Magdalena died in her hut under the great oak—after Manacasset, the chieftain, had been killed in battle. In her first years as captive she had been a prisoner of the tree's great arms—never allowed to "leave its shade." But in age she had come to love the tree as only the words of her own will can convey. There could hardly be a more interesting, or more touching, document of her time than Magdalena's will:

"I, Magdalena Noyes, bequeath to my daughter, Gwawa, and her husband, Tschagarag, all my property, consisting of the 17½ acres of land, the hut I live in and all therein. And if contentment the germ of happiness be transferable, may you receive it and enjoy it all through life.

"I have also a request which I beg of you fulfill: Regard the Oak that overspreads our dwelling as an ancient relic. Cherish it through life as the talisman of a resigned sufferer. Should you be blessed with offspring, instill them with reverence for the tree such as will transmit from generation to generation."

Knowing its story, you do feel an almost personal quality in the peace, beauty and enduring strength of this great old tree—"Treaty Oak."

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